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ABSTRACT

A discussion of speech behavior and social distance outlines the major ways in which the study of rules of speaking can provide insights into the norms and values of a speech community. It shows ways in which the same material can provide information about the interaction process and the situations in which interlocutors negotiate their relationships with one another, and then advances a theory concerning patterns of interaction within a general middle class American speech community. Speech behavior is shown to be a reflection of cultural values, and various examples of compliments and apologies in American English illustrate the concept. Speech behavior is also related to the negotiation of rules. The "bulge" theory is proposed based on the way the frequencies of certain types of speech behavior plot out on a diagram, with the two extremes showing similar patterns as opposed to the middle section, which displays a characteristic bulge. That is, there is a qualitative difference between the speech behavior that middle class Americans use to intimates, status unequals, and strangers on the one hand, and to non-intimates, status-equal friends, co-workers, and acquaintances on the other. The two extremes of social distance--minimum and maximum--seem to call forth very similar behavior, while relationships that are more toward the center show marked differences. Data on invitations and partings illustrate the point. The fact that urban middle class Americans live in a complex and open society means that individuals belong to a number of networks, overlapping and non-overlapping, in which they must continually negotiate their roles and relationships with one another. Contains 18 references. (LB)

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THE BULGE: A THEORY OF SPEECH BEHAVIOR AND SOCIAL DISTANCE[1]

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is threefold. Firstly, I want to outline the major ways in which the study of rules of speaking can provide insights into the norms and values of a speech community. Secondly, I will discuss ways in which the same material can provide information about the interaction process and the situations in which interlocutors negotiate their relationships with one another. Lastly, I will put forth a theory concerning patterns of interaction within a general middle class American speech community.

The choice of looking at speech behavior in the researcher's own speech community should be understood to be purposeful and critical to the analysis. As Schneider (1968: vi) points out in the preface to his book on American kinship, the insights one has into one's own speech community permit a level of analysis which is far deeper than that which can be reached in other field sites:

> There is another reason why the study of kinship in America is especially important to Americans and that is that as Americans, this is a society and a culture which we know

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> well. We speak the language fluently, we know the customs, and we have observed the natives in their daily lives. Indeed, we <u>are</u> the natives. Hence we are in an especially good position to keep the facts and the theory in their most productive relationship. We can monitor the interplay between fact and theory where American kinship is concerned in ways that are simply impossible in the ordinary course of anthropological work. When we read about kinship in some society foreign to our own we have only the facts which the author chooses to present to us, and we usually have no independent source of knowledge against which we can check his facts....
>
> By the same token of course we are able to achieve a degree of control over a large body of data which many anthropological fieldworkers hardly approach, even after one or two years in the field. Hence the quality of the data we control is considerably greater, and the grounds for evaluating the fit between fact and theory is correspondingly greater.

The issue of evaluation by other researchers who are themselves members of the speech community under analysis is of great importance here. Much of what the researcher brings to light about the speech behavior of the community in question and what it reflects about the value system and the social structure of that community, may be new in the sense that it has not been noticed or subjected to critical analysis from the perspective of the social scientist. Nevertheless, once an analysis of one's own group has been made, it is open to the evaluation of other social scientists who may also be members of the same community and who therefore have the means of examining and evaluating what has been analyzed through their own observations and intuitions.

One further issue concerning the choice of studying the behavior of middle class speakers of American English needs to be examined here. This is that the unit of analysis which I refer to as "middle

class speakers of American English" is necessarily circular. In my opinion, the most useful definition of speech community is that given by Hymes (1972):

> Tentatively, a speech community is defined as a community sharing rules for the conduct and interpretation of speech, and rules for the interpretation of at least one linguistic variety. Both conditions are necessary.

A major point here is that not all speakers of a language do share the same rules of speaking, and therefore, not all may be said to belong to the same speech community. In defining and using the analytical unit which we call a speech community, we need to recognize that speakers of a single language often constitute many different speech communities, each with its own norms and rules of speaking. Where speech community may be said to correspond to geographical area, this fact is relatively easy to deal with. The English speaking world, for example, is made up of a large number of speech communities, composed of both native and non-native speakers. Even where boundaries may be said to coincide with territory which is politically or geographically or even socially defined, the situation is terribly complex. Nevertheless, it is possible to say, without doing too much violence to the facts or to the feelings of those being spoken of, that the British and the Australians differ sharply from the Americans in many aspects of linguistic usage although all three nations have English as their dominant language. Further, people who have lived in more than one English speaking country, or who have interacted extensively with people from one of the other English speaking nations, know that pronunciation, grammar and lexicon are not the only features that differentiate one set of

speakers from another. Norms and values differ and so too do rules of speaking. But within political and geographic boundaries, we have a great variety of smaller social groupings, and these are much less easy to define. For this reason, it is impossible to speak of investigating the rules of speaking for English, or indeed, any other language. Depending on the group studied, the rules are likely to vary. This, of course, leads to some extremely difficult questions. If a speech community is to be defined by shared rules, and if these rules are largely unanalyzed and also, very importantly, unavailable to the conscious knowledge of native speakers, where do we begin? Even where we notice patterns of usage, how can we tell how far they extend? The most straightforward answer is to focus on groups which have some sort of pre-existing definition apart from speech usage. A group which shares a particular territorial space and whose members interact frequently has been called a primary network. It may reasonably be expected that rules of speaking will be shared within such a group (see Milroy 1980, for example) since interaction is maximal, and people often function in many different roles vis a vis one another (on the job, at church, in the neighborhood, etc.). If, however, our concern is to describe the speech behavior or rules of speaking which obtain across such sub-groups and which have a wide enough frame of reference to be useful to such applications as language teaching and learning, then we are faced with an inescapable circularity in the definition of our object of study. That is, a speech community is defined as a group which shares rules for the use and interpretation of speech, but there may be no pre-defined feature external to speech which can be used as a

criterion of membership. Furthermore, when the language under consideration is, like English, that of a number of complex, highly industrialized societies, each composed of a great number of sub-groups, the notion of speech community must be used at a level of abstraction which ignores many subtle distinctions.

Thus, in speaking here of American middle class speakers, I am forced, if I wish to make any generalizations, to treat them as a speech community and to investigate what the various sub-groups in this category have in common. This does not mean that I wish to ignore differences in norms and values and speech behavior which stem from, for example, regional or ethnic identities, but rather that I will take such distinctions into account as factors in the analysis. In this respect, I follow Goffman who, in the preface to his book, Relations in Public (1971), says:

> So the problem is not merely that of having to make statements about groups and communities without sufficient data, but that of not knowing very much about the identity and boundaries of the groupings about which there are insufficient data. I employ the term 'our' but do so knowing that in regard to small behaviors the 'our' cannot be conventionally or conveniently specified. I can with least lack of confidence make assertions about my 'own' cultural group, the one with which I have had the most first-hand experience, but I do not know what to call this grouping, what its full span or distribution is, how far back it goes in time, nor how these dimensions might have to be changed, according to the particular bit of familiar behavior under question.

In spite of the above disclaimers, with which I agree completely, it is nevertheless the purpose of this paper to attempt to cast some light on the speech behavior of the present-day American urban middle class, and what this behavior reflects about the structure of this society. I do

this in full recognition that the unit of analysis is messy at best. Still, as Hymes (1974) says:

> The most novel and difficult contribution of sociolinguistic description must be to identify the rules, patterns, purposes, and consequences of language use, and to account for their interrelations. In doing so it will not only discover structural relations among sociolinguistic components, but disclose new relationships among features of the linguistic code itself.

This paper, then, is intended as an attempt to contribute to sociolinguistics.

Speech Behavior as a Reflection of Cultural Values

To begin with, a speech act or act sequence, whether it be apologizing, thanking, scolding, complimenting, inviting, greeting or parting, or even the telling of a performed story, has important cultural information embedded in it. At the most superficial level, sociolinguistic data collected systematically and analyzed objectively can yield information as to what specific formulas and routines are in use in a particular speech community, as well as their patterns of frequency and appropriateness in different speech situations. This is, in itself, not a trivial matter. As Ferguson (1976) has so aptly written:

> All human speech communities have such formulas, although their character and the incidence of their use may vary enormously from one society to another. What formulas are in existence and in which situations they are used must be discovered empirically for no two communities are exactly alike.

An example of the sort of information to be gained by an examination of the surface structure of a speech act is the work on compliments in American English (Wolfson 1978, Wolfson and Manes 1980, Manes and Wolfson 1981, Wolfson 1981, Wolfson 1984). In analyzing data collected from a wide range of spontaneous interactions, it was discovered that compliments are characteristically formulaic both in terms of semantics and of syntax.

While the number of words which could be chosen to evaluate positively, or compliment, is almost infinite, the fact is that the great majority of speakers actually used a restricted set of adjectives and verbs in their compliments. Two-thirds of all compliments that make use of adjectives to carry the positive semantic load, do so by means of only five adjectives: nice, good, beautiful, pretty and great. Because nice and good lack specificity they are usable with almost any subject. In present-day American English, beautiful is rapidly approaching the same status. The fact that pretty is used more than great, which is the more general adjective, reflects the greater than equal number of compliments directed at women in this society.

In the twenty-five percent (25%) of compliments which make use of a verb rather than an adjective to carry the positive load, ninety percent (90%) make use of just two verbs: like and love.

At the syntactic level, fifty percent (50%) of all compliments are characterized by the following formula:

NP (is/looks) (really) ADJ

Two other syntactic patterns:

I really (like/love) NP

and:

PRO is (really) (a) ADJ NP

account for twenty-nine percent (29%) of the data. What this means is that only three patterns are needed to represent approximately eighty percent (80%) of all the compliments given and received by middle class speakers of American English. Furthermore, only nine syntactic patterns account for ninety-five percent (95%) of the well over twelve hundred examples of compliments that make up the data.

The compliment formulas found in this analysis look very familiar and indeed, intuitively obvious to native speakers. What was not obvious until the data were analyzed is that the way in which we give verbal expression to our approval and appreciation of one another's appearance and accomplishments is largely pre-patterned. However, the tendency among middle class Americans interviewed was to regard compliments as sincere or insincere based on whether or not they were given using recognizable formulas. Thus, most people felt that if the speaker were sincere, the compliment would somehow be original rather than pre-coded. The easiest way to demonstrate to native speakers that sincerity has very little to do with the form or wording of the compliment is to ask them to give compliments to one another, paying close attention to what they say. In just such an experiment, my colleague Virginia Hymes asked members of her class in linguistics to write down a compliment to the student sitting next to them in the

classroom at that moment. All of the twenty-two student responses fell into the categories of formulas analyzed and discussed in Wolfson and Manes (1980) and in Manes and Wolfson (1981). The following examples are typical:

1. "Your necklace is very pretty."
2. "I like your shirt."
3. "You are looking radiant this morning."

In a similar experiment, I asked members of one of my own graduate seminars in sociolinguistics to give each other verbal compliments. The setting was extremely informal, since there were only six students in the group, and we were enjoying the last day of summer class by sitting around a swimming pool. The following represent all of the compliments given by members of this group:

4. Rosemarie to Myra: "I love your hat."
5. Myra to Marilyn: "I love your new watch."
6. Marilyn to Lucille: "That's a cute dress."
7. Lucille to Irene: "Your glasses are very attractive."
8. Irene to Midori: "The colors in your sweater are pretty."
9. Midori to Myra: "I like your swimsuit."
10. Myra to Rosemarie: "I love the way you smile."
11. Rosemarie to Nessa: "I love what you've done to your garden."

In addition to the pre-coded nature of these compliments, it is worth noticing that I (the professor) was the only addressee who received a compliment on something other than appearance. This fits together with findings concerning the ways in which gender and social status interact to condition speech behavior that will be discussed below.

Looking a bit beneath the surface structures, we can, through

systematic field work, learn a good deal about the rights and obligations that members of a community have toward one another, information which is culture specific and not necessarily available to the intuitions of the native speaker.

When we examine the kinds of apologies which occur in a specific speech community, for example, we see evidence not only of the linguistic forms in use, but also of the content and the context of what Goffman (1971) has called remedial interchanges. In analyzing the events which elicit apologies in everyday interaction, the researcher can come to some reasonable conclusions about what people feel they have the right to expect from one another. For example, it is commonly believed that middle class Americans regard their time as a valuable commodity. The notion that members of this group consider themselves under obligation to be prompt and/or to avoid keeping another person waiting is in fact, evidenced by the large number of apologies that refer to just this situation. When, for example, one party to a previously planned lunch meeting arrived to find that the others were all waiting, she said:

12. "Hi, have you been waiting long? I'm really sorry."

If lateness is something to apologize for, not turning up at all for a social commitment appears, from the data, to be an even greater offense. The following apology, given on the telephone, will exemplify the way vocabulary is used to elaborate the expression of apology. The choice of the lexical item <u>mortified</u> as opposed to use of one of the

apology formulas such as I'm sorry demonstrates a type of elaboration which reflects the speaker's recognition that the offense had been great and her strong desire to make the repairs necessary to support the relationship. The speaker had accidentally missed a lunch date with her female colleague who had waited for more than half an hour and then called to find out why she had been stood up:

13. A: "Joan? I'm mortified, I really am. I can't figure out how it happened--I had you in my calendar for tomorrow!"
B: "Mortified? Is that all?" (laughter)

Obviously, the social obligations not to be late and more important, not to forget an appointment, are far from the most serious rules one could imagine. They are, however, very typical of the sort of apologies one hears in conversation. As Goffman (1971), in his discussion of apologies as remedial interchanges has pointed out, apologies are an implicit, self-judgment that speakers make against themselves, a recognition that they have broken a social norm and are responsible for whatever harm this has caused.

The work of Cohen and Olshtain (1981), Olshtain (1983) and Olshtain and Cohen (1983) has focused on apologies, examining the pragmatic and formal aspects of apologies as used by native speakers and by language learners. Through the use of discourse completion tests which require subjects to write down what they think they would say if they were in a given situation, the researchers attempted to discover the set of formulas that speakers believe they use to make apologies. Olshtain and Cohen hypothesized that the choice of apology form would be related to the severity of the offense and to the social

identity of the interlocutors. Finally, using the same data collection technique, they compared data elicited from speakers of English vs. Hebrew with respect to both the formal aspects of apologies and the social situations that elicit them.

While the data collection procedure used does not demonstrate the range of behavior which is found in spontaneous interaction, Olshtain and Cohen were nevertheless able to ascertain that the conditioning factors leading to apologies were rather different for Israelis than for the Americans in their sample. That is, what were seen as offenses by one group, did not necessarily count as such by the other. Furthermore, the groups differed with respect to the weight each offense carried.

In a much larger, international study, the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project, Olshtain, Blum-Kulka, and several other researchers around the world[2] carried out a very similar project on apologies and directives, using a variation of the original discourse completion test. As my own contribution to the study, I, along with two other American sociolinguists, Tom Marmor and Steve Jones, carried out an observational study of apology behavior in addition to making use of the group questionnaire. In the observational work we looked not only at the pragmatic and formal aspects of apologies, but at the notion of offense itself and what it could be seen to embody for middle class speakers of American English. We did this with the expectation that the situations which elicited apologies in our own society might not do so in others; that these rules are culture-specific.

As an example of what may be seen from the analysis of data from spontaneous speech, let us take the findings on the obligation to respect the property of others. For example, a woman walks into her friend's house, holding the door for the cat to go out. Then, seeing her friend's expression, says:

14. A: "Isn't the cat allowed out?"
B: "No, we keep him inside."
A: "Oh, I'm sorry--I'm so used to letting our cat out, I didn't even think. Shall I try and get him?"

The obligation not to cause damage or discomfort to others is a second instance where apologies are used. For example:

15. A: (stopping suddenly while driving so that passengers lurch forward) "Shit. Sorry. Excuse me."

Examples 13 through 15 illustrate major apology categories. More subtle and less commonly found categories are also useful in mirroring the norms and values of speakers in the community. A case in point is the obligation not to make others responsible for one's welfare (Wolfson and Jones 1984). For example, after complaining about personal problems the day before, a woman said to a close friend:

16. A: "I'm sorry I was in such a bad mood yesterday. I shouldn't have bothered you with my troubles."

Apparently she felt that even a long-standing friendship did not entitle her to unlimited attention.

Speakers also shared an obligation not to appear to expect another person to be available at all times. The following example of an apology given for disturbing another person will show the way in which

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this obligation operates:

17. (A woman customer walks into a place of business.)
A: "Hi, Sam, I hope this is a good time for you."
B: "Well, actually, I'm supposed to be at a meeting upstairs right this minute."
A: "Oh. I'm sorry. I knew I should have called first."

Thus, by observing what people apologize for, we learn what the cultural expectations are with respect to what people owe one another. In contrast, the study of expressions of gratitude yields information about what participants do not take for granted--what they regard as going beyond duty or obligation and therefore in the realm of favors or kindness not necessarily expected but nevertheless appreciated.

To say that the systematic observation of apologies on the one hand and thanks on the other can yield important cultural information is not to suggest that each case in which a speaker is observed to say I'm sorry or Thank you will constitute an example of the same category of social obligations at work. Indeed, the work of the sociolinguist would be infinitely easier if there were such a straightforward correlation between speech behavior and social reality. Speech behavior is, however, not so simple. In the case of both apologies and thanks, the formulas which are most often associated with the speech act may also be used in ways which are, in fact, not instances of such an act and may, indeed, have a very different meaning in the particular context. Clark and French (1981), for example, demonstrate this point in their description of telephone exchanges which end, not with the standard form goodbye or any of its variants, but rather with thank you. Further evidence for this pattern emerged from research

undertaken by Josephine Rabinowitz, who studied the ways in which leave-taking was accomplished in service encounters. Rabinowitz (1983) reports that she found that thank you was used very frequently to mark partings but that there were "no goodbyes in 89% of the face-to-face encounters" she studied.

In investigating the distribution of the forms Excuse me and I'm sorry, Borkin and Reinhart (1978) found that I'm sorry, although usually referred to as an expression of apology in English, is not necessarily used to apologize at all. Rather, it is an expression of regret or dismay "about a state of affairs viewed or portrayed as unfortunate". For this reason it is perfectly appropriate for English speakers to say I'm sorry even when no injury or potential injury has been done. Thus, I'm sorry is used to express regret when refusing an invitation even though no social norm has been violated.

It is important to point out in this connection that although the intuitions of native speakers are very useful in interpreting the meaning of an interaction, they are not sufficient in the sense of giving us conscious access to patterns of speech behavior. This problem is commented upon by Borkin and Reinhart (1978) who discuss the fact that non-native speakers frequently use the forms Excuse me and I'm sorry, and that native English speaking teachers are themselves unable to explain what the rules are:

> Being native speakers of English is not enough to equip teachers with the kind of conscious knowledge of sociolinguistic rules that is necessary to help students use these formulae in routine, but important, social interactions with native speakers of English.

Perhaps the richest insights into cultural values are gained by analysis of the judgments people express. If we look at the compliments speakers give, we discover what values are made explicit through the expression of admiration and approval. For example, when we see that again and again in the data collected by observing middle class native speakers of standard American English, compliments are given on objects that are new, and even on appearance that has changed, we can say with some evidence from actual speech behavior, that Americans seem to value newness. When we see, in one compliment after another, that speakers of American English compliment one another on looking thin or on losing weight, it is not difficult to come to the conclusion that Americans, unlike many other cultural groups, regard thinness as a positive attribute. If we look at a large range of compliments collected from naturally occurring speech, we see that what is common to all is that in one form or another, compliments are directed towards achievement. In many cases, the manifestation of achievement resides in the ability or the good taste or the wherewithall to effect positive change in one's appearance or to purchase new items. In other cases, it may have to do with the kind of family or friends one has or with a particular act well done. We could go on and on listing the cultural assumptions implicit in the compliments which have been collected from the spontaneous speech of native speakers of American English and, indeed, Manes (1983) has given a detailed account of the means by which values are reflected in compliments. The point here is that by looking at what is complimented, we can come to some reasonable conclusions as to what is

valued in the society in question. What is important for the purposes of this argument is that all this information is embedded in the speech acts themselves.

Speech Behavior and Negotiation of Rules

Another way in which sociocultural insights may be gained through the study of rules of speaking is to focus on the way the social identities of interlocutors vis a vis one another conditions what is said. Here it is useful to take two different, though overlapping, perspectives. On the one hand, by looking to see who has the right or the obligation to greet, thank, or apologize, we can learn a great deal about how the society is structured.

On the other hand, if we examine the relationship of speech act form, or degree of elaboration used, to the identity of the interlocutors, we can often get at something much more subtle and difficult to characterize--the social strategies people in a given speech community use to accomplish their purposes--to gain cooperation, to form friendships and to keep their world running smoothly.

When we look first at the way what is said reflects cultural values, it is immediately apparent that not all speech acts are equally informative. The most useful in this regard are, like compliments, thanks and apologies, of a type that involve a specific topic and that make an implicit or explicit judgment. Speakers compliment one another

on belongings or appearance or performance; they thank or apologize for an action. The topics of these speech acts are not necessarily stated explicitly, but they must at least be understood so that they can be inferred from the context. At the other end of the speech act spectrum, we have greetings and partings, which are spoken specifically to mark beginnings and ends, openings and closings of encounters, and which do not necessarily contain evidence of cultural values in themselves. Between the two, we have invitations, which, like greetings, focus on social interaction in and of itself. Because they have to do with planning and commitment to specific activities, invitations do often give us information about the kinds of social events that different groups within the community are likely to participate in, and even about which kinds of activities are planned as opposed to spontaneous or taken for granted.

In some speech communities, for example, it is normal practice for friends, family and neighbors (who may, in fact, be the same people) to visit or even to turn up for a meal or a weekend or several weeks' stay without any announcement at all and certainly with no explicit invitation; that is, in such communities, it is part of the obligations of people in certain role relationships to extend hospitality to one another for any length of time and under virtually any circumstances (Ayorinde Dada, personal communication). In other speech communities, specifically large complex urban communities, even a short visit to the home of another member of the family or to a close friend requires an invitation, or, at the minimum, a telephoned self-invitation. Clearly, the kinds of invitations which the researcher might collect in two such

different speech communities would be very different in kind and in distribution.

Using this same body of data and focusing on the social identities of participants, rather different insights are likely to emerge. In this respect, speech acts of all types appear to be equally informative. Thus, if we are interested in analyzing what the rights, obligations and privileges of speakers are vis a vis one another, or in who engages in which speech act with whom and in which situations, we can probably learn as much from studying greetings, partings and invitations as we can from analyzing thanks, apologies and compliments. And most interesting of all, if we look at the forms people use spontaneously with different interlocutors, we frequently find that the degree of elaboration corresponds not only to speakers' roles and expectations, but also to the manipulation of roles and the formation or re-affirmation of relationships.

A customer in a busy department store, for example, may, in order to gain the attention and service of a saleswoman, step out of her role as customer and engage in a friendly chat, signalling solidarity of age and sex, and the difficulties they share as working mothers.

The Bulge: A Theory of Social Interaction

A case in point is a consistent finding of mine that there is a qualitative difference between the speech behavior which middle class

Americans use to intimates, status unequals, and strangers on the one hand, and to non-intimates, status-equal friends, co-workers, and acquaintances on the other. I call this theory the bulge, because of the way the frequencies of certain types of speech behavior plot out on a diagram, with the two extremes showing very similar patterns as opposed to the middle section, which displays a characteristic bulge. That is, when we examine the ways in which different speech acts are realized in actual everyday speech, and when we compare these behaviors in terms of the social relationships of the interlocutors, we find again and again that the two extremes of social distance--minimum and maximum--seem to call forth very similar behavior, while relationships which are more toward the center show marked differences.

On the face of it, this may seem very strange and even counterintuitive. What do intimates, status unequals, and strangers have in common that non-intimates, status equal friends, co-workers, and acquaintances do not share, and what does the last mentioned group have in common that the first does not share? Very simply, it is the relative certainty of the first relationships in contrast with the instability of the second. Put in other terms, the more status and social distance are seen as fixed, the easier it is for speakers to know what to expect of one another. In a complex urban society in which speakers may belong to a variety of non-overlapping networks, relationships among speakers are often uncertain. On the other hand, these relationships are dynamic, and open to negotiation. There is freedom here but not security. The emergent and relatively uncertain nature of such relationships is reflected in the care people take to

signal solidarity (Brown and Gilman 1960) and to avoid confrontation.

For example, although compliments are exchanged between intimates and between total strangers, the great majority (the bulge) occur in interactions between speakers who are neither. This is a question of frequencies and not of absolutes. Compliments do, of course, occur in interactions between interlocutors who are intimates, status unequals, or even strangers. In fact, compliments on performance are often very important in the relationship of boss to employee or teacher to student (see Wolfson 1983). Where the compliment has to do with appearance, sex is the major variable, overriding status in virtually all cases. This in itself is an interesting finding since it relates directly to the position of women in American society and touches on sociocultural expectations of a very different sort (Wolfson 1984). For the purposes of this discussion, the important point is that of all compliments, no matter what their topic, the great majority occur betweeen status equals among whom the potential for lessening of social distance exists.

The data on invitations is even more striking in this regard. With respect to this speech act, we have found that the data collected from spontaneous interactions fell into two categories (Wolfson 1981; Wolfson, D'Amico-Reisner, Huber 1983). The first consisted of unambiguous, complete invitations giving time, place, or activity and a request for response. These unambiguous invitations occurred most frequently between intimates and between status unequals--the two sets of interlocutors whose relationships with the speaker were at the

extremes of social distance. The second category of invitations consisted of ambiguous or incomplete references to the possibility of future social commitments. Once a large body of data had been collected, it was possible to recognize these so-called invitations as "leads". Utterances such as "We really must get together sometime." or "Let's have lunch together soon." are typical examples. But in order for a social commitment to result from a "lead", it was nearly always the case that both parties to the interaction took part in negotiating the arrangement. And what was particularly interesting about these "leads" was that they occurred between status-equal non-intimates--that is, between speakers whose relationships are most open to redefinition. As I described it then (Wolfson 1981), the data showed that inequality of status favors unambiguous invitations and disfavors attempts at negotiation, and that the same is true of intimacy. What inequality of status and intimacy have in common is that in both situations, interlocutors know exactly where they stand with one another. In contrast, speakers whose relationship is more ambiguous tend to avoid direct invitations with their inherent risk of rejection, and instead negotiate with one another in a mutual back-and-forth progression which, if successful, will lead to a social commitment. To illustrate the difference between the two types of interactions, we have the following examples:

1) The unambiguous invitation:
   A. "Do you want to have lunch tomorrow?"
   B. "Okay, as long as I'm back by 1:30."

2) The negotiated social arrangement:
   A: "You doing anything exciting this weekend?"
   B: "No, I'll be around the pool here."
   A: "OK, I'll see you."

B: "Maybe we'll barbeque one night."
A: "OK, that's a nice idea. I'm tied up Sunday night."
B: "All right. We'll keep it loose."

A begins to walk away and then turns and walks back, saying:

A: "We're supposed to do something with Helen tomorrow night. Want to do something with us?"
B: "Ok. Let us know."

At the time, I speculated that the fact that Americans seemed, from my observations, so hesitant to put themselves in a position to be refused and so often prefer to arrive at a social arrangement through the mutual effort of a negotiation may well say something interesting about Americans.

Since the publication of this work on invitations, studies of other speech acts have uncovered similar patterns. Thus, the findings of work on partings done by Pam Kipers, Jessica Williams, Josephine Rabinowitz, Marsha Kaplan and myself last year provided, in some respects, even stronger evidence that speakers behave in markedly different ways with those who occupy fixed positions in their social world, and those with whom their relationships are less settled. As Kipers (1984) put it, "Where there is no framework of social contact in place to assure casual friends and acquaintances that a future meeting will take place, partings reflect concern over the survival of the relationship. Mean number of turns in these partings was the highest of any group in this study. Individual utterances were notably longer too...the lengthy negotiations over future meeting time reassure both participants that even though they may not designate a definite time when they will see one another again, they both value the relationship enough to want it to continue." While all partings share certain basic

features, our analysis indicates that shared knowledge of social distance and mutual certainty of future meeting are the important conditioning factors. As Williams (1984) says, "Where one or another or both of these factors is shared by the participants, interactions will exhibit certain predictable characteristics. Pre-partings will be absent as will lengthy negotiations as to when the parties will meet again. Parting signals and 'goodbye' and its variants will occur in only a minority of cases. Conversely, when knowledge of both social distance and time of future meeting are absent, partings diverge from this pattern."

Similarly, Reisner (1983,1985) in her study of expressions of disapproval, found that among native speakers of American English direct disapproval was expressed almost exclusively to intimates or to strangers in service encounters. When disapproval was expressed to non-intimates, only very indirect forms were used.

As Reisner (1985) puts it: "When exchange types are considered with respect to social distance, the data reveal generally low non-intimate participation in disapproval exchanges." In analyzing the grammatical forms which function to express disapproval, Reisner finds that two of the most frequent syntactic patterns, imperatives and rhetorical questions, are never used by non-intimates. The two patterns chosen for use to non-intimates by the speakers she studied are declarative sentences and the response-expected question. Even these patterns, however, are used significantly less often by non-intimate interlocutors, with only 28% of the declaratives and 25% of

the response-expected questions uttered in "disapproval exchanges" between people who were not on intimate terms.

Reisner then goes on to say that "all but 7% of the declaratives in non-intimate exchanges and 9% of the response-expected questions in non-intimate exchanges were issued during service encounters. What this means is that ninety-four percent (94%) of all the disapproval exchanges among non-intimates were found to occur between strangers. This illustrates the pattern described above in which intimates and strangers (or people at the extreme ends of the social distance continuum) tend to behave similarly, in contrast to the verbal behavior of those who occupy the middle range of the social spectrum. Put differently, one could say that interlocutors who are in the bulge almost never voice their disapproval of one another overtly. Thus, we see that a systematic analysis of constraints on the social identity of participants in disapproval exchanges yields additional support for the theory of social interaction that I have put forth.

If the expression of disapproval is relatively rare among speakers within the social category which I have labeled the bulge, the same cannot be said for expressions of gratitude. Indeed, as researchers into first language acquisition (e.g., Grief and Gleason 1980) have pointed out, thanking routines are among the earliest which young English-speaking children are explicitly taught. Given the nature of this routine and the importance placed on it, it is very interesting to note that Eisenstein and Bodman (1983) in their description of expressions of gratitude used by native speakers of American English,

comment that they found the language patterns used in interactions between status unequals to be the same as those used between status equals. However, they point out, "What was different in the formal setting was that there were few uses of expressing surprise and complimenting. . . in expressing gratitude, it may be that formality is conveyed by what is not said as well as through specially marked lexical items." That is, they found that the thanks were restrained, or unelaborated in situations where the interlocutors were of unequal status while expressions of gratitude among friends contained not only the formulaic thanks but also considerable elaboration. As they state in their conclusion, "Shorter thanking episodes sometimes reflected greater social distance between interlocutors."

Conclusion

There is, then, evidence for the bulge pattern I have described here, not only in my own analyses but also in a number of studies by other scholars. The fact that this convergence has been found in analyses of investigators who were unaware of the existence of the bulge theory is, I think, very striking. It follows from this that previous research must be examined to see if there is evidence of the bulge in the work of earlier scholars.

The fact that urban middle class Americans live in a complex and open society means that individuals are members not of a single network in which their own place is well defined, but rather belong to a number

of networks, both overlapping and non-overlapping, in which they must continually negotiate their roles and relationships with one another. The importance of the bulge theory lies in what it tells us about how the very openness and potential for mobility of American middle class society is reflected in our everyday speech behavior.

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